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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the Bridges to Leadership 2000 program is to implement a service delivery model for economically disadvantaged and minority youth with disabilities, from ages 11 to 21. The program is conducted with the help of the Howard University Research and Training Center for Access to Rehabilitation and Economic Opportunity, and is being carried out in the District of Columbia, New Jersey, Michigan, Georgia, New York, and California. The program provides role models, mentorship, and work orientation to enable participants to increase their social and work-related skills. Experiences are designed to bring about increased confidence, information about the world of work, and positive self-concepts. In addition to monthly meetings, special events are organized throughout the year. Other features of the program include the integration of disabled and nondisabled students, the Annual Career Day Conference, special achievement incentives, networking and collaboration, and assistance in finding summer employment. (JDD)

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BRIDGES TO LEADERSHIP 2000: HOWARD UNIVERSITY YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

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Abstract

This article discusses the Bridges to Leadership 2000 program. The purpose of this program is to implement a service delivery model for the economically disadvantaged and minority youth with disabilities (ages 11-21). This program receives support from a wide cross-section of individuals and organizations. In Washington, D.C. youth leadership meetings take place on the first Friday of every month; special events are organized on several Saturdays during the project year. The program provides knowledge about the world of work, self-confidence and social skills. Various activities include children with disabilities as well as those without disabilities. The project is being carried out in the District of Columbia, New Jersey, Michigan, Georgia, New York, and California. A Career Day Conference and a Special Achievement Incentives Contest are implemented on an annual basis in participating cities.

PURPOSE

The purpose of Bridges to Leadership 2000 Program is to implement a service delivery model for economically disadvantaged and minority youth with disabilities. This unique program provides role models, mentorship, and work orientation that enables the participants to increase their social and work related skills. The program also facilitates their functioning at the post secondary educational level and in competitive employment. The training project offers experiences for young people and their families. These experiences are designed to bring about increased confidence, information about the world of work and positive self-concepts. Activities are designed for the economically disadvantaged and minority youth with disabilities between the ages of 11 - 21 in the Washington, DC Metropolitan area, New Jersey, Detroit, Atlanta, New York, Los Angeles, and other geographical areas in the United States.

The motto for the Bridges to Leadership 2000 Program is:

B uilding Bridges to
R ole Models
I ndependence
D ignity
G rowth
E conomic Excellence
S uccess

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Program Description

The Youth Leadership Training Program was initiated in August, 1989. In order to implement this program, several schools and agencies in the Washington, DC area were contacted. Information flyers, membership and consent forms were developed and distributed to all participating schools and agencies in all geographical locations. This program is being conducted with the help of Howard University Research and Training Center for Access To Rehabilitation and Economic Opportunity (HURTC's) Task Force Committee in each of these locations. This program receives support from a wide cross-section of individuals and organizations. The following organizations have cooperated with the Center in the implementation of the Howard University Youth Leadership Training Program:

1. National Aeronautic and Space Association
2. American Association for the Advancement of Science
3. Howard University Office of Recruitment
4. The President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities
5. Pack 304, Club Scouts of the Boy Scout of America, Benjamin Banneker District of the National Capital Area
6. Youth Missionary Organization of First Baptist Church

Youth leadership meetings take place on the first Friday of every month. During each project year a number of special events are organized on Saturdays in Washington, D.C. These special events accommodate students who are unable to join the group during their regular monthly meeting, including children of members of the Center's Parents' Advisory Committee.

At the first meeting students selected team leaders and team names. This, for most students, was the first opportunity to work with a group in a democratic manner. Job training for youth with disabilities, in many cases, has been too narrowly focused with emphasis on specific job skills. Many training programs fail to focus adequately on the development of social communication and independent living skills (Walker, 1991). In addition, youth with disabilities are often steered towards positions where supervisors and co-workers are inadequately prepared to work with an individual who has a disability. All too often students with disabilities are encouraged to enter low level jobs such as mail rooms, food service operations and factories.

Youth with disabilities need to be prepared for work in a wide array of occupations including science, technology, human services, education, law, and allied health fields (Walker and Asbury, 1990). The Howard University Youth Leadership Training Program provides knowledge about the world of work, self-confidence, and social skills which are not readily available to the youth through typical job training programs. The Bridges to Leadership 2000 Youth Training Program offers information about non-traditional jobs for youth such as careers in Law, Education, Science, and Technology.

The seven teams from the Washington, DC area are:

Barnard Achievers
Ballou Knights
Nalle Positive Plus
Blacks with Abilities
Blacks On the Rise
Calvin Colts
Mighty Achievers

With the exception of the Mighty Achievers which meet bimonthly, these teams participate in the monthly meetings which focus on various career opportunities and educational requirements. Each team is given a monthly assignment in advance and is asked to then work within their school to develop print and audio-visual materials. Each team is asked to include the following types of information during their presentation:

1. Educational qualifications needed to pursue a specific career (e.g. Law, Education, Science, and Technology)
2. Investigate their own career goals
3. Specific job responsibilities
4. Accomplishments of minority professionals in the field.

The above guidelines provide a framework for specific team assignments. Team presentations are made in the form of short story, skit, or panel presentations. Guest speakers are invited to serve as role models and leadership partners. Guest speakers may or may not have disabilities but must be very successful people in their field. During their presentations, they share personal experiences including the types of barriers they had to overcome in order to achieve their professional goals.

Other special features of the Bridges to Leadership 2000 Program include:

The integration of disabled and non-disabled students: For example, non-disabled students and Pack 304 Club Scouts of First Baptist Church participate in field trips and special programs. In addition, each of the monthly meetings include both students with and without disabilities.

- **The Annual Career Day Conference and special seminars:** An Annual Career Conference is held which provides workshops, exhibits, and training materials for participants. In addition to the Career Day Conference which is held in Washington, DC, seminars and awards programs have been held in a number of cities including New York, Detroit, Atlanta, and Los Angeles.

- **Special Achievement Incentives contest titled, "Embracing Diversity:"** This is implemented on an annual basis. The contest which is held in a number of cities (Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, Detroit, Atlanta, and Newark) encourages students to express their creative abilities in the areas of art, creative writing, and three dimensional design. Prizes, awards and certificates are awarded based on specified criteria. Every student who enters, receives some type of recognition. Therefore this program provides positive reinforcement.

- **Networking and Collaboration:** The Howard University Youth Training Program relies heavily on collaborative efforts. In addition to Task Force Committees in each of the cooperating cities, the following types of organizations support the program: churches, corporate sector, public schools, and government agencies.

- **System Success Program, New Jersey Bell:** The "Systems Success Program," which is part of the Newark Board of Education in New Jersey, is a program which focuses on providing support and encouragement to high school students with disabilities. The HURTC is collaborating with the "Systems Success Program". Mr. Isaac Hopkins, a prominent community leader in New Jersey and a member of the HURTC's National Advisory Committee, provides a bridge between Howard University and the Systems Success mentorship program. Students and parents participate in Bridges to Leadership 2000 activities on an ongoing basis. For example, Systems Success students have participated in:

  A. The Embracing Diversity Contest
  B. Career Day Conference activities
  C. The 1990 National Symposium: Minority Americans with Disabilities

  The latter was a part of the Annual Meeting of the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities. These activities expose youth with disabilities to various social situations which in turn increase their social and communication skills.

Summer Employment Efforts

Bridges to Leadership 2000 also helps youth in finding summer employment. Various government and private agencies are contacted in order to identify possible job opportunities. Youth are assisted in completing employment applications (SF-171) and follow through with agencies. Summer employment information flyers are distributed, along with information sharing at various meetings including the Parents Advisory Committee meeting. A select number of students have also had opportunities to work at the HURTC during the summer. Students were made aware of the summer employment opportunities at the National Institute of Health and the Naval Research Laboratory. Information about job opportunities at various organizations and agencies is distributed during each project year.

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